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REMARKS

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IN JUNE 1984, WHEN THE SURGEON GENERAL'S WORKSHOP ON BREASTFEEDING AND HUMAN LACTATION WAS HELD, THE CONSENSUS AMONG HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WAS THAT BREASTFEEDING IS BY FAR THE MOST BENEFICIAL WAY TO FEED NEWBORNS AND INFANTS. THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS ALSO RECOMMENDED MANY ACTIONS TO HELP WOMEN BREASTFEED.

A YEAR LATER WE LOOKED AT THE SUBJECT AGAIN AND PUBLISHED A REPORT OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY THAT WERE INDEED PROMOTING THE CHOICE OF BREASTFEEDING.

THE SURVEY RESULTS WE ARE ANNOUNCING TODAY MEASURE PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT BREASTFEEDING ONLY TWO YEARS AFTER OUR WORKSHOP WAS HELD. THE RESULTS ARE DELIGHTFULLY REASSURING. EITHER WE WERE UNDULY PESSIMISTIC TWO YEARS AGO, OR WE HAVE WORKED WONDERS IN A VERY SHORT TIME.

BUT IN EITHER CASE, THREE QUARTERS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC NOW RECOGNIZE THAT BREASTFEEDING IS THE BEST WAY TO FEED A BABY AND WOULD, IF THEY WERE ABOUT TO HAVE A BABY, CHOOSE -- OR SUPPORT THEIR PARTNER'S CHOICE -- TO BREASTFEED.

TWO THIRDS OF THE PEOPLE THINK THAT A WORKING WOMAN CAN CONTINUE TO BREASTFEED HER BABY AND A MAJORITY THINK THAT A WOMAN'S EMPLOYER SHOULD PROVIDE THE FACILITIES FOR HER TO COLLECT HER MILK OR NURSE HER BABY.

TWO YEARS AGO THE WORKPLACE WAS AN AREA OF CONCERN TO THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS. MANY FELT THAT THERE WERE STRONG NEGATIVE FORCES THAT WERE INHIBITING WOMEN FROM BREASTFEEDING. AMONG THOSE NEGATIVE FORCES WERE THE FEELINGS OF CO-WORKERS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY THAT THE WORLDS OF WORK AND HOME SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATE.

THE WORKING WOMAN CAN BE CONFIDENT NOW THAT MORE OF HER CO-WORKERS WILL SUPPORT HER DECISION TO CONTINUE BREASTFEEDING. AND, ONCE ARMED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS GENERAL ATTITUDE, EMPLOYERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE WORKPLACE HAS FACILITIES FOR A NURSING MOTHER.

WHILE ANALYZING THE SURVEY RESULTS, I WAS STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT THERE WAS STRONG SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING ACROSS DIFFERENT AGE AND ETHNIC GROUPS, INCOME AND EDUCATION LEVELS, GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES, AND GENDER.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, ON MOST QUESTIONS MEN -- EVEN MORE THAN WOMEN -- SUPPORTED BREASTFEEDING. AND I HOPE THAT FACT BECOMES WIDELY KNOWN BECAUSE I THINK IT WOULD PROVIDE ADDITIONAL YET ENCOURAGEMENT FOR WOMEN TO CHOOSE BREASTFEEDING, KNOWING HOW SUPPORTIVE THE MEN AROUND THEM ARE.

THE SURVEY ALSO ASKED PEOPLE HOW THEY FELT ABOUT WOMEN BREASTFEEDING THEIR BABIES IN PUBLIC:

A FEW SAID IT MADE THEM UNCOMFORTABLE.

A THIRD SAID A WOMAN SHOULD NOT NURSE HER BABY IN PUBLIC.

BUT TWO THIRDS SAID EITHER THAT IT WAS A PERFECTLY NATURAL THING TO DO OR IT MADE NO DIFFERENCE TO THEM.

THE SURVEY ALSO REVEALED THAT YOUNGER AND LESS EDUCATED PERSONS TEND NOT TO SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING. I WOULD THINK THIS SHOULD BE THE GROUP TO WHICH WE NEED TO SEND A STRONG AND CONSISTENT MESSAGE THAT BREAST MILK IS THE HEALTHIEST, LEAST EXPENSIVE FOOD FOR THEIR BABIES.

ALSO MOST PEOPLE DID NOT REALIZE THAT AS MANY 6 OF EVERY 10 NEW MOTHERS TODAY ARE CHOOSING TO BREASTFEED THEIR BABIES. IT'S POSSIBLE THAT, IF MORE PEOPLE KNEW THAT WAS THE CASE, THE OVERALL APPROVAL RATE WOULD BE EVEN GREATER THAN THE 72 PERCENT WE ALREADY HAVE IN THIS SURVEY.

LET ME CLOSE WITH THIS OBSERVATION.

ALMOST A DECADE AGO THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, WITH THE HELP OF EXPERTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY, SET THE FOLLOWING TARGET FOR THE YEAR 1990:

WE HOPED THAT BY 1990 AT LEAST 75 PERCENT OF ALL WOMEN LEAVING THE HOSPITAL WITH NEW BABIES WOULD CHOOSE TO BREASTFEED THEM AND THAT AT LEAST 35 PERCENT OF ALL MOTHERS WHO DID SO, CHOOSE WOULD STILL BE BREASTFEEDING THEIR BABIES AT 6 MONTHS OF AGE.

I'M ENCOURAGED BY THIS SURVEY. I BELIEVE OUR SOCIETY WILL REACH THESE NATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MAYBE EVEN SURPASS THEM.

TO THAT END, I CALL UPON ALL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS -- PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ADVISE AND INFLUENCE WOMEN ON THIS MATTER -- TO JOIN ME IN ENCOURAGING EVERY NEW MOTHER TO CHOOSE TO BREASTFEED IF SHE CAN. IT'S ONE OF THE VERY BEST THINGS SHE CAN DO FOR HER NEW CHILD.

THANK YOU.

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